**SCHOOL READINESS FUNDING IS CURRENTLY IN OPEN ENROLLMENT**

**Palmetto, Florida, May 17th, 2019** – The Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County (ELC) School Readiness child care funding is available to eligible families to assist them in obtaining affordable, high quality child care. The ELC has been actively enrolling children from the program’s wait list since July of last year and since that time has invited 416 children from nearly 300 families to complete their funding opportunities.

The School Readiness wait list currently consists of about 250 families, with an anticipated wait time of approximately 6 months. Families who were added to the wait list in October 2018 were invited to complete their funding requests in April 2019. The ELC expects to continue open enrollment through the end of 2019. Interested families should visit the Florida Office of Early Learning’s Family Portal online here: [https://familyservices.floridaearlylearning.com/](https://familyservices.floridaearlylearning.com/).

Children are eligible for child care funding assistance from birth through 12 years of age. If families meet the below eligibility criteria, they may qualify for child care funding either through a referring agency or by applying to our wait list:

- Parents or guardians that receive cash assistance for the family or for the relative children;
- Children under Protective Services or in foster care – regardless of income;
- Families receiving assistance through Salvation Army, HOPE, Community Haven, Easter Seals, or Manatee Children’s Services Kinship Program;
- Children living in a low-income family where parent/guardian work or attend school at least 20 hours per week. (Income eligibility requirements apply.)

Paul Sharff, ELC Chief Executive Officer said: “The ELC of Manatee County is pleased to be able to offer financial assistance to so many low-income families in Manatee County for early education and care. We encourage eligible families to apply for School Readiness assistance so they can become financially self-sufficient and to help their children develop the skills needed to achieve future educational success.

Families wishing to speak to someone about School Readiness child care funding may contact the ELC’s Family Services department at (941) 757-2900 x210 – or by visiting our office at 600 8th Avenue West, Suite 100, Palmetto, FL 34221 -- however all applications must be made online through the Family Portal.

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**MEDIA RELEASE**

Palmetto, FL
May 17th, 2019

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The Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County, Inc. is a multi-service agency dedicated to helping children develop skills that they will need to be successful in school and life. The agency’s focus is on high quality school readiness opportunities for all children and their families, understanding that it is in the first years of life that a child's future educational success is determined and the critical role of parents, as their child's first and most important teacher. To learn more about Coalition's services, go to www.elc-manatee.org or call 941-757-2900, extension 212.